

Speaking Notes
for
The Honourable Bill Blair
Minister of Emergency Preparedness and President
of the Queen's Privy Council

Emergency Debate – Truckers Protest

February TBC, 2022

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[APG]

Mr. Speaker,

Thank you for the opportunity to rise in debate on this motion from the member for Burnaby, on the events that have taken place in Ottawa.

Today, we made an important announcement:

The Government of Canada has convened a table between all three orders of government, to make sure the City of Ottawa and its police service can fulfil their responsibilities.

I want to begin by assuring the people of Ottawa that we'll continue to support the city and its police in their work as police of jurisdiction.

And I want to extend my gratitude to all the police services assisting in this effort.

As the member for Burnaby has described, what we've seen is a significant and, frankly, unacceptable impact on the lives and freedoms of people who live and conduct business in Ottawa.

[APG]

Indeed, this has impacted Canadians coming to business in the nation's capital, along with the protests we have seen in other areas across the country.

Since the outset, we have encouraged those who are engaged in this process to obey the law and respect the rights of their fellow citizens.

To the people of Ottawa and on behalf of our government, let me first say that we share in your frustration and deeply regret that the actions of these protesters continue to inflict such disruption in your neighborhoods.

The RCMP, the parliamentary protective services and other federal partners have remained in close contact with the Ottawa police service and we continue to play a significant coordination role between these agencies.

But let me be clear.

It is not role of any government to direct law enforcement operations.

[APG]

It is the responsibility of the police of jurisdiction, and in this case the Ottawa Police service, to maintain public order and to uphold the rule of law.

They must have the appropriate resources and they do have the appropriate tools that they require to keep their community safe.

And in circumstances where events exceed the capacity of the police service to respond as they are required to do, there are well-established authorities for the police to seek assistance.

And as the federal government, we are here to provide support to local police and have responded affirmatively to every request that we've received.

There has been ongoing work to ensure that we're mobilizing all resources to provide every support that is required.

Yesterday, the City of Ottawa declared a state of emergency.

[APG]

In response to this, the federal government is proposing to convene a trilateral table with municipal and provincial partners.

I reached out today to the Solicitor General for province of Ontario and to the Mayor of Ottawa, to convene a table that I believe will allow us to keep lines of communication open during what is a fluid and dynamic situation, and to respond with speed and efficiency to meet the city's needs.

This is building upon the active and ongoing conversation, collaboration and coordination has taken place on every political level between our respective officials and allow us to keep these lines of communication open.

There's been open and active engagement from our senior public officials to senior public officials and the City of Ottawa to provide support and there is close collaboration between the provincial services and police services and the RCMP.

And roles and responsibilities have been made very clear.

[APG]

It is very clear, for example, that the Police Services Act in Ontario creates a responsibility for the police service of jurisdiction, in this case the Ottawa police service, to obtain public order and to provide for law enforcement.

And we're working together collaboratively to make sure that all three orders of government are there for the City of Ottawa, and most importantly, for the residents of Ottawa to ensure that their police service has the resources and the support that they need to do their job.

With respect to the federal role, there are a number of important players.

I'll speak briefly to the specific role of the Government Operations Centre, or GOC.

The GOC is responsible for coordinating the Government of Canada's response to emergency events, including natural disasters, human induced events and situations that affect the national interest.

[APG]

It provides national-level situational awareness to partners and to senior decision makers.

It provides 24/7 monitoring for government and in support of partners' mandates.

It ensures whole-of-government response capability.

The GOC monitors and reports on current or potential threats on a 24/7 basis.

It provides national-level situational awareness, integrated risk assessments, and response plans in collaboration with federal departments, provincial and territorial governments, and partners.

The GOC is ready to respond to any situation, at any time.

Its all-hazards approach to planning, response and support means the Government of Canada can adapt quickly, under any circumstance, when a province or territory asks for help.

[APG]

The GOC maintains awareness of a wide range of issues that could affect the safety and security of Canadians at home and abroad.

And it gathers and shares information under the authority of the *Emergency Management Act* and the *Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Act*.

Further, with respect to emergency preparedness, Mr. Speaker, in Canada, emergencies are managed first at the local level.

If they need assistance at the local level, they request it from the provinces or territories.

If the emergency escalates beyond P/T capabilities, the provinces or territories seek assistance from the federal government.

Should a province or territory make an official request for federal assistance (RFA), there is a well-established process in place for managing RFAs, through the GOC, including interdepartmental consultation and coordination of all departments as required.

[APG]

The process is the same for requests for Assistance to Law Enforcement Activities.

Mr. Speaker, I'll point out that, since January 2020, the Government of Canada has supported over 160 Requests for Federal Assistance.

There has been outstanding collaboration between the responding organizations from all orders of government in response to this emergency, and I want to thank all those on the front lines who continue to battle to keep Canadians safe.

Mr. Speaker, as I close my remarks, I would like to take the opportunity to address those individuals who are still participating in this demonstration.

Many of the actions that have taken place over the course of this demonstration have been unlawful.

And, frankly, disrespectful to the rights and freedoms of all Canadians.

It is well past the time to bring this protest to an end.

[APG]

Canada is a peaceful nation and we serve as an example of hope to countries around the world and we look after our neighbors and treat each other with respect in this country.

We do not intimidate or threaten fellow citizens, we don't desecrate the national war memorial or desecrate statues of heroes or bring symbols of hate and discrimination.

The freedom to engage in lawful, peaceful assembly and process is a fundamental Charter right.

However, when an event is no longer peaceful, when the event is disrupting the lives and jeopardizing the livelihoods of fellow Canadians, business owners have been forced to close out of concern over safety for their staff and families with young children haven't been able to sleep due to the constant honking of horns – this, frankly, needs to end.

The last two years have been incredibly difficult for every single Canadian.

[APG]

The pandemic has impacted the mental health of Canadians in every part of the country.

We missed holidays and celebrations with family and with friends.

We've had to say good-bye to far too many loved ones over video calls and people have felt alone, isolated and scared.

We all want this pandemic to be over.

We have all made sacrifices and we want to return to normal as quickly as possible.

And we will get there.

But the way forward is not by infringing upon the freedom and rights of your fellow Canadians.

It's why getting vaccinated is so important, doing your part to protect yourself and your community.

[APG]

I want to reiterate my thanks to all involved in responding to the events unfolding in Ottawa, Coutts, Alberta and elsewhere, for their ongoing diligence and respect.

And I want to be clear to all Canadians – we will not create policy out of aggressive, unlawful intimidation.

We will do so working together with all partners, according to the latest and best science and evidence.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[APG]